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The Call of Kansas and Other Verses

By Esther Mary Clark

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The Call of Kansas and Other Verses

By Esther Mary Clark

Surfeited here with beauty, and the sensuous-sweet perfume
Borne in from a thousand gardens and orchards of orange bloom:
Awed by the silent mountains, stunned by the breakers' roar---
The restless ocean pounding and tugging away at the shore---
I lie on the warm sand beach and hear, above the cry of the sea,
The voice of the prairie, calling, calling me.

Sweeter to me than the salt sea spray, the fragrance of summer rains:
Nearer my heart than these mighty hills are the windswept Kansas plains:
Dearer the sight of a shy, wild rose by the roadside's dusty way
Than all the splendor of poppy-fields, ablaze in the sun of May.
Gay as the bold poinsettia is, and the burden of pepper trees,
The sunflower, tawny and gold and brown, is richer to me, than these.

And rising ever above the song of the
hoarse, insistent sea,
The voice of the prairie, calling, calling me.

Kansas, beloved Mother, today in an alien
land,
Yours is the name I have idly traced with
a bit of wood in the sand:
The name that, flung from a scornful lip,
will make the hot blood start:
The name that is graven, hard and deep,
on the core of my loyal heart.
O higher, clearer and stronger yet, than the
boom of the savage sea,
The voice of the prairie, calling, calling me.

There are many to sing of the noble deeds
of Kansas' favorite sons:
The men who stood in the early days so
manfully by their guns.
Who shed their blood at the Nation's call
for the martyr-state's release,
And led her out of the depths of war and
into the ways of peace.
I honor them all; but I honor, too, the
Infinite Wisdom's plan
Of putting a man behind the gun, and a
woman behind the man!

The men of the days of Old John Brown---
Lord love them, every one!---
Each is a hero in Kansas' eyes, and each
is a favorite son.
But I venture to say that you'd find if you got
right down to the truth of things
They were mostly held to their duty's post
by a couple of apron strings!
For who could waver, or who could fail in
that struggle in Freedom's name
When woman's courage and woman's faith
were backing him in the game?

Our dear fore-mothers! who lived and loved
in the days when the State was young,
(And many have gone to their last long rest,
unhonored, unknown, unsung)
For Woman rose to the needs of the hour
when the dear-bought peace was won,
And backed up the man at the plough as
well as she'd backed up the man at
the gun!
He gave **his** strength for the land's increase,
his voice to the new State's good,
But back of his every word and deed some
valiant woman stood.

There are men at the front in our State
today, and back of each one stands
Some dauntless woman with loving heart
and ready and willing hands.
I do not ask for her, Equal Rights, nor a
voice at your polls as yet,
(For Heaven knows I am anything but a
rampant suffragette!)
But give her a place in your Halls of Fame,
along with your honored ones;

Let Kansas' favorite daughters rank as high as her favorite sons.

I pledge you loyally, heart and hand, as only a Kansan can.

A toast:

To the Man who is at the front---and the Woman behind the Man!

Dear Lord, there is so much to do in one
brief, busy day:
The little clothes to wash and iron, and
mend and put away;
The littered toys to gather up, the little beds
to make;
And little griefs to soothe away from little
hearts that ache.
The little bodies to be kept, for Thy sake,
clean and sweet,
As temples for the dwelling of the Christly
spirit meet.
And Mary Mother one time knew the
blessedness of this:
The little feet to wash at night, the little
lips to kiss.

Forgive me, Lord, if that I seem neglectful
of Thy work.
It is not that my heart is hard, it is not that
I shirk.
But that my heart and hands are full with
these, my little ones,

My little daughters, fair and sweet, my
sturdy little sons.
Once I rejoiced in serving Thee, and only
Thee alway;
And now sometimes I am so tired I cannot
even pray.
But I draw near at night to Him whose
mother knew the bliss
Of tender, little feet to wash, and little lips
to kiss.

If I hadn't had you, my dear,
My Dear,
In the years that we've been together,
With your happy tongue and your jest and song,
No matter how gray the weather;
If I hadn't had you when my hope was low,
To comfort and tease and love me,
I'd have seen no green in the grass below,
No blue in the sky above me.
And the world had been empty and sad and drear,
If I hadn't had you, my dear,
My Dear.

If I didn't have you, my dear,
My Dear,
With the glamour of youth about you,
When the day's work drags and my courage flags,
Why, what should I do without you?
If I didn't have you when the day is long
And the long, long night comes after;

If I didn't have you when the world goes
wrong,
To set it aright with laughter,
There'd be small need of my tarrying here,
If I didn't have you, my dear,
My Dear.

A wild rose by the wayside path,
  Upheld her head in simple pride;
A passing wind, in sudden wrath,
  Outflung her petals far and wide.
And, shuddering, I turned aside:
  Is some dread Presence, then, so near?
For through the stillness something cried:
  "Tomorrow **you** may not be here!"

At dawn I heard a wild lark fling
  His soul out in a single strain,
As if his gladness in the Spring
  His little heart could not restrain.
Now, on the grass a crimson stain---
  The song hath cost the singer dear---
And in my heart the old refrain:
  "Tomorrow, **you** may not be here!"

* * *

Forgive me if I cannot speak
  Of matters trivial and light;
For O, my heart and lips are weak,
  And I am filled with strange affright:
Dear, if I read the sign aright,
  There is some reason for the fear;
So fold me, hold me close tonight---
  Tomorrow I may not be here.

This, that my hand must never touch;
  This, that my eyes must never see;
This, that my heart has craved so much;
  This, that was never meant for me;
I will not say, that the world may hear:
  "I have not longed for it, no, not I!"
I will say: "Though lovely and fair and dear,
  It is mine to conquer, and put it by."

Now, mine the sacrifice, mine the pain,
  And the bitterness, till the struggle cease.
Then, mine the glory and mine the gain,
  And mine the triumph, and mine the peace.
O hand, be steady! O heart, be strong!
  'Tis not for this we shall faint and die!
Though tempted sorely, and tempted long,
  It is ours to conquer, and put it by.

* * * * * *

"But what of thy dearest?" saith One to me,
  (In the Time to be, when the years are done)

"The earth-thing, dearly beloved of thee---
Thy heart's one treasure---or hath it one?"
O white the lips that have kissed the rod,
But strong the heart that shall make reply:
"I am what I am by the grace of God
And the strength that conquered, and put it by."

O blest is he whose sorrow
  Hath lasted but a night!
Thrice blest he whose tomorrow
  Dawns ever fair and bright!
Yet who, the wide world over,
  Could choose to sit and sigh?
With underneath, the clover,
  And overhead, the sky.

Then make no friends with trouble,
  And have no peace with gloom;
For surely Joy is double
  When all the Earth's a-bloom!
Look up! There bends above you
  The tender, shelt'ring sky.
Look down! And there, to love you,
  The clover, sweet and shy.

Last night the wind fell sobbing
  Against my window pane,
And like my heart's dull throbbing
  There beat the mournful rain.
But now the storm is over
  There's none so blithe as I,
With underneath, the clover,
  And overhead, the sky.

When I was just a tiny, blue ginghamed,
pig-tailed miss
My young affections centered on such a
day as This.
I fed my soul on flowery verse and valen-
tine-y frills,
And bandy-legged Cupids gave me most
delightful thrills.
But I've outgrown such childishness--no
frills and thrills in mine!
I want a million dollars to be my Valentine.

For these were fleeting fancies, and with
my tender teens
My tastes grew more expensive, though I
kept within my means.
I still was keen on frills and thrills, but with
my lengthened frocks
I wanted the hand-painted kind, all done
up in a box.
But even for these dear delights to-day I
do not pine:
I want a million dollars to be my Valentine.

And in my early twenties I, yet mindful of
the day,

Demanded tokens in a still more mercenary way.
A five-pound box of chocolates would really give me thrills,
Or Beauties at a dollar per, in florist's paper frills.
But these no longer stir my blood to ecstasy divine:
I want a million dollars to be my Valentine.

Romance is dead in me to-day, and I am thirty-three.
No loves and doves, no hearts and darts, no lacy frills for me!
No five-pound box of chocolates, no roses rare and red---
What little heart I had has formed a merger with my head.
The only thing I think of that would thrill me through and through
And satisfy my yearnings is---a copper-mine or two.
O Postman, bring a railroad, or a trans-Atlantic line,
Or just a million dollars to be my Valentine!

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